IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims to read as set forth in the Listing of Claims below:

1. (currently amended) A method for ~~isolating~~ preparing fetal nucleated red blood cells (NRBCs) present in maternal peripheral blood for prenatal genetic investigation, comprising the steps of:

a) ~~transferring~~ mixing maternal blood ~~into non-physiological,~~ tissue culture medium, ~~which after addition of~~ and an aqueous solution containing citric acid, Na citrate and dextran, to form a non-physiological tissue culture mixture ~~has~~ having the following characteristics:

pH	6.4-6.6	
osmolality	300-330	mOsm
Na^+	150-170	mmol/l
K^+	4.5-5.5	mmol/l
Cl^-	100-115	mmol/l
Ca^{++}	1.00-2.50	mmol/l
glucose	400-500	mg/dl
Lactate	10-20	mg/dl

b) ~~maternal blood, as modified in a) is transferred~~ transferring the non-physiological tissue culture mixture obtained in step a) into a cell separation device, followed by ~~the introduction~~ introducing into ~~the~~ said separation device ~~of~~ a liquid having ~~an higher~~ a density higher than maternal blood and containing a red blood cell RBCs aggregating agent,

c) ~~the nucleated cells, having a lower density than the liquid introduced in the step b) are isolated;~~ in ~~the~~ discontinuous density gradient, ~~by~~ subjecting the separation device to centrifugal force to isolate the NRBCs having a lower density than the liquid introduced in step b);

d) washing the isolated ~~cells~~ NRBCs ~~are washed~~ and ~~resuspended~~ resuspending them in tissue culture medium ~~to regain physiological cell metabolism~~; and

e) identifying fetal ~~cells are identified~~ NRBCs by appropriate identification procedures and ~~counted~~ counting said fetal NRBCs.

2. (cancelled).

3. (currently amended) The method of claim ~~3~~ 1 in which the non-physiological ~~medium~~ mixture obtained in step a) has the following characteristics:

pH	6.5	
osmolality	320	mOsm

Na^+	165	mmol/l
K^+	5.35	mmol/l
Cl^-	110	mmol/l
Ca^{++}	1.25	mmol/l
glucose	500	mg/dl
lactate	10	mg/dl.

4. (original) The method of claim 1 in which the RBCs aggregating agent of step b) is Ficoll.

5. (original) The method of claim 1 in which the density of the liquid introduced in the separation device by the step b) is 1.068 g/ml.

6. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 in which the separation device used in step b), comprises an elongated chamber ~~(1)~~, whose cross section decreases from the base towards the top, at least a first channel ~~(2)~~ one end of which opens into ~~the~~ said chamber near ~~the~~ said base and the other end is connected to a pressurized liquid source, and a second channel ~~(3)~~ one end of which opens into the ~~same~~ elongated chamber ~~(1)~~ at the device top while the other end opens at the exterior of the device, ~~the~~ said device further comprising at least one additional channel ~~(4)~~, one end of which opens at a middle level of said chamber height and the other end opens at the exterior of the device.

7. (new) A method for identifying fetal nucleated red blood cells (NRBCs) present in maternal peripheral blood, comprising the steps of:

a) mixing maternal blood, tissue culture medium, and an aqueous solution containing citric acid, Na citrate and dextran, to form a non-physiological tissue culture mixture having the following characteristics:

pH	6.4-6.6	
osmolality	300-330	mOsm
Na^+	150-170	mmol/l
K^+	4.5-5.5	mmol/l
Cl^-	100-115	mmol/l
Ca^{++}	1.00-2.50	mmol/l
glucose	400-500	mg/dl
lactate	10-20	mg/dl;

b) transferring the non-physiological tissue culture mixture obtained in a) into a cell separation device, followed by introducing into said separation device a liquid

having a density higher than the red blood cells (RBCs) and containing a red blood cell (RBC) aggregating agent;

c) in discontinuous density gradient, subjecting the separation device to centrifugal force to isolate the NRBCs having a lower density than the liquid introduced in step b);

d) washing the isolated NRBCs and resuspending them in tissue culture medium; and

e) identifying by appropriate identification procedures fetal NRBCs.

8. (new) The method of claim 7, further comprising counting the identified fetal NRBCs.

9. (new) The method of claim 1, in which the separation device is as illustrated in Fig. 1.